



# Learning Matters



Digitized by the Internet Archive  
in 2015

# LEARNING MATTERS

**The Journal of the Durham Technical Community College  
Teaching-Learning Center**

Volume 5, Number 1  
Fall 2011

**Editor**  
Gabby McCutchen

**Editorial Consultant**  
Thomas Gould

**Teaching-Learning Center Advisory Committee**

Kara Battle  
Kerry Cantwell  
Marcia Daniell  
Wayne Durkee  
Erin Riney  
Marye Vance  
Sherry Wilson

**Published by**  
The Durham Technical Community College  
Teaching-Learning Center

Copyright © 2011 Durham Tech TLC  
All rights reserved. No portion of this journal may be reproduced  
without written permission from the editor.

The opinions expressed on the pages of *Learning Matters* are understood to reflect the views of the authors only.

*Learning Matters* is a publication of the Teaching-Learning Center of Durham Technical Community College. All material is Copyright © 2011 *Learning Matters*. Unauthorized use is a violation of applicable copyright laws. Copyright reverts to author upon publication. Authors agree to cite *Learning Matters* in any future publication of material.

#### Submissions/Contact Information

Gabby McCutchen  
Coordinator, Teaching-Learning Center/Faculty Development  
Durham Technical Community College  
(919) 536-7223 ext. 8083  
[mccutcheng@durhamtech.edu](mailto:mccutcheng@durhamtech.edu)

Visit the Durham Technical Community College Teaching-Learning Center website <http://courses.durhamtech.edu/tlc/>

---

## Editor's Note

The fifth volume of *Learning Matters* continues Durham Technical Community College's contribution to the scholarship of teaching and learning. *Learning Matters* is a reminder that the college's mission, "to enrich students' lives and the broader community through teaching, learning, and service," is put into practice every day by the talented and dedicated faculty on our campus.

This volume of *Learning Matters* summarizes the experiences of the faculty participants in the March 2011 study tour to the Dominican Republic organized by the Center for the Global Learner. Five faculty members and one instructional administrator spent one week in the Dominican Republic. They returned to campus energized by their experiences and motivated to share those experiences with their colleagues and their students. The articles collected here describe their reflections on the study tour.

The success of the Teaching-Learning Center is due to the support it receives from faculty through their presentations, participation, and contributions to *Learning Matters*. In particular, the work of the TLC would not happen without the dedication of TLC Advisory Committee, and the accuracy of *Learning Matters* would not happen without the continued editorial support of Dr. Thomas Gould, Dean, Arts, Sciences, and University Transfer.



## Table of Contents

### **LeAnne Disla and Constanza Gomez-Joines**

Introduction .....	6
--------------------	---

### **Marianne Williams**

Interdependency: Our Students and the Villagers of Sonador .....	11
--	----

### **Kerry Cantwell**

Barn-Raising in a Global Village: How the Faculty Study Abroad Helped Me Rethink Cultural Literacy on Campus .....	15
---	----

### **Peter Wooldridge**

The Impact of Faculty Study Abroad on the Globalization of the Curriculum .....	28
--	----

### **Kasey Jordan**

Stories from the Dominican Republic .....	32
---	----

### **Erin Riney**

On Democracy: What a Developing Country had to Teach Someone from the Heart of the Free World .....	35
--	----

### **Lance Lee**

Learning to Speak Dominican .....	42
-----------------------------------	----

## Introduction

### LeAnne Disla and Constanza Gomez-Joiner

Community colleges are under pressure to meet local economic needs while simultaneously preparing a globally competitive workforce. How can administrators, faculty, and staff fulfill this obligation? More specifically, how can a study of Latin America, as well as partnerships with institutions and groups in Latin America, enhance this endeavor? The examination of these questions has prompted the development of a partnership between The Center for the Global Learner (CGL) at Durham Technical Community College and the Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies (CLACS) at Duke University. Working together, the Outreach Director of CLACS, Dr. LeAnne Disla, and the Executive Director of Durham Tech's Center for the Global Learner, Dr. Constanza Gomez-Joiner, established the "Connecting the Americas Initiative" in Fall 2010.

The goals of this initiative are to explore the political, economic, and social interconnections between communities in the United States and communities in Latin America and to identify the possibilities garnered through cultural and social exchanges. Through this initiative, we have begun to develop partnerships to address needs within local communities, schools, and classrooms.

The current partnership involves a year-long project centered around a week-long faculty study tour in the Dominican Republic (DR). In 2009-2010, CLACS conducted a similar tour with a group of Durham Public School teachers. Based on the preliminary groundwork laid down during this previous tour, we developed a plan for a tour in March 2011. The components of this experience for participating Durham Tech faculty included four three-hour pre-trip workshops, a seven-day tour to the DR, and several post-trip follow-up activities designed to engage faculty in processing and sharing what they learned. Faculty participants in the study abroad experience read literature centered on the DR, including *In the Time of the Butterflies* by Julia Alvarez and *The Farming of Bones* by Edwidge Danticat. These works not only engaged faculty in developing a personal interest in these regions of the world, but they also posed questions related to freedom and, more specifically, the political, economic, and social constraints that challenge the responsibilities that all members of a society have in upholding and promoting freedom. In essence, the DR served as a case



study, allowing faculty to learn from the history of the DR, while also developing a deeper understanding of these issues.

Faculty spent seven days in the DR. During this time, they visited La Universidad Católica Nordestana (UCNE), a private university in the DR that offers degrees in medicine, engineering, nursing, and the humanities. UCNE is also in the process of developing the first Dominican community college that will offer several two-year degree programs. Through meetings with the rector of the university, faculty explored ways to collaborate and to engage with this endeavor.

In addition, faculty spent time in a remote, rural area of the DR, exploring ways to develop partnership projects within this region. They also met with a group of artists from Movimiento Artístico Hermanas Mirabal (MARHMI), an association dedicated to using public art as a tool to build healthy and vibrant communities, raise social consciousness, and explore the significance of social freedom. With over 200 professional artists, MARHMI painted more than 360 large murals focused on peace and development in three communities in the DR. This initiative is considered the largest muralist project in the Caribbean.

As part of the program's requirements, the faculty members who participated in the study tour committed to sharing their findings with Durham Tech's students, faculty, staff, and the community at large. Upon their return, they conducted a well-attended presentation in Durham Tech's Teaching-Learning Center (TLC) where they talked about their personal experiences during their stay in the DR and how the experience has influenced them as individuals, educators, and global citizens. In addition, they created a blog in which they shared extracts of the journals that they had maintained throughout their stay in the DR.

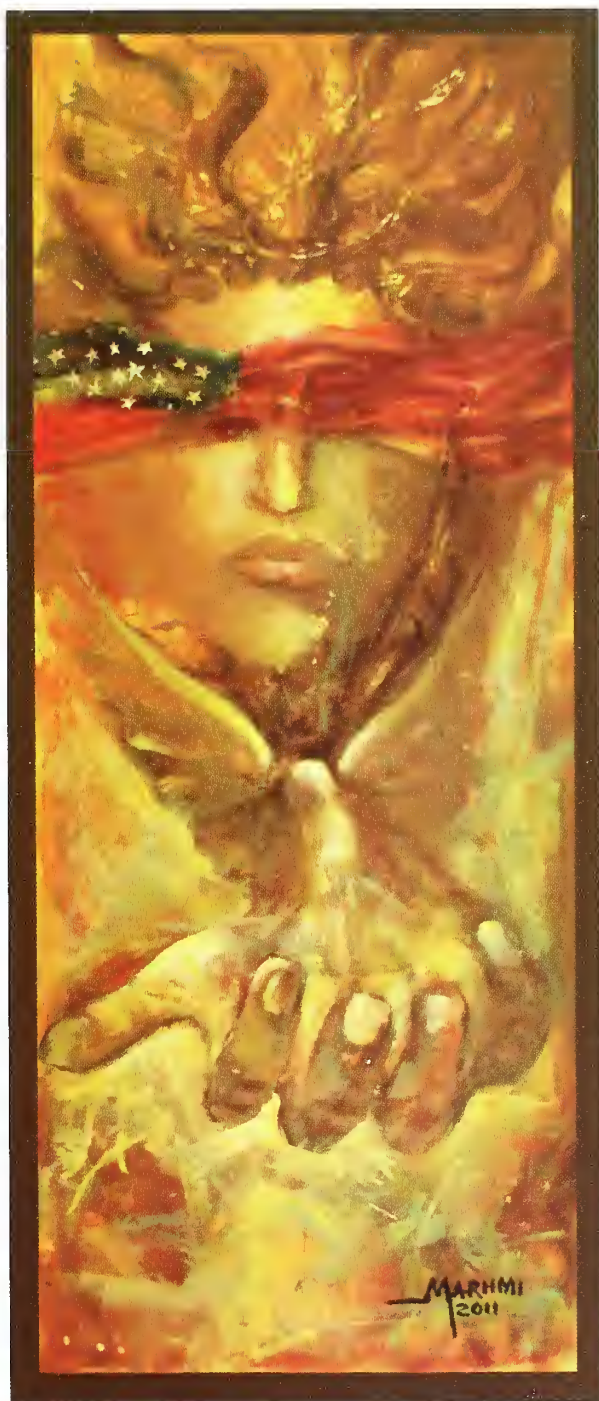
The study tour was not only a life-changing experience for the faculty members who attended, but has led to many initiatives and additional opportunities. In July 2011, CLACS and the CGL hosted seven Dominican artists from MARHMI. During the artists' stay, Durham Tech organized an exhibit of their artwork at a local Durham restaurant, Tyler's Restaurant and Taproom, and hosted the first of the Durham Tech President's Lecture series. During the presentation, Dr. Disla introduced the artists, spoke about the ideology of the movement, and showed images of the murals

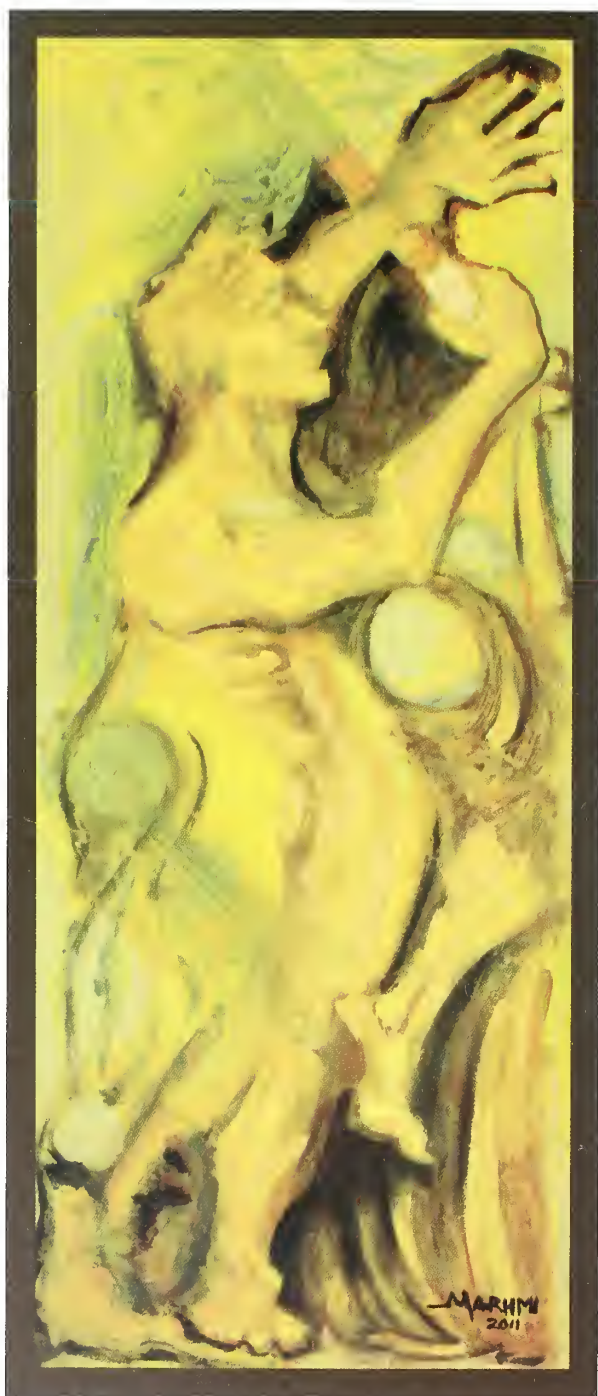
painted in the DR. The presentation was followed by an engaging question/answer session between the artists and the audience.

One of the highlights of the artists' visit was the two murals that they painted specifically for Durham Tech. The artists allowed students, faculty, and staff to watch their process, and it was an amazing experience. In preparation for their work, the artists separated into two groups. After a brief five-minute conversation, they began to paint, with no verbal communication whatsoever, and in unquestionable harmony, two 6 by 4 feet inspiring and breath-taking paintings that will decorate the walls of Durham Tech (images of the paintings follow this introduction). The untitled paintings were subsequently named "Lady Justice" and "The Book of Knowledge" by students and faculty members. Inspired by "Lady Justice," the Student Senate has asked to use the painting as the starting point for a conversation about civility and sharing memories.

Currently, the Center for the Global Learner is organizing a study tour for students similar to the one attended by the faculty members. Students will enroll in HUM 180 (International Cultural Exploration) and attend seminars that discuss the literature, politics, and culture of the DR. In March 2012, they will travel to the DR for a week and meet with Dominican college students; instructors; government officials; artists; and, it is hoped, Dedé Mirabal, the only Mirabal sister to survive assassination by the Trujillo government. Upon their return, the students will be required to reflect on their experience and complete a series of assignments developed by the instructor.

Initiatives such as the study tour are at the heart of Durham Tech's strategic initiative to emphasize globalization. The Center for the Global Learner aims to help students develop an understanding of global issues and encourage them to experience cultures other than their own so that they can become productive citizens in our multinational and global society (Durham Tech's Strategic Goals). The study tour and the relationship that Durham Tech has built with the DR has become our first model for international dialogue and exchange.





## **Interdependency: Our Students and the Villagers of Sonador**

**Marianne Williams**

In March 2011, six faculty members of Durham Tech set out over spring break with a Duke professor from the Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies to visit the Dominican Republic and see what connections we can make there. We encountered many people who are full of hopes and dreams for their children which they believe can be fulfilled through education. As educators, we experienced changed lives and hopes fulfilled as a result of schooling, and certainly that is our mission at Durham Tech. But how can our own Durham Tech students benefit from helping the people of Sonador fulfill their hopes and dreams?

Sonador is a small remote village of forty families in a rural section of the Mirabal province of the Spanish-speaking Dominican Republic. It is situated on the Caribbean island of Hispaniola, which it shares with the nation of Creole-speaking Haiti. Sonador is part of the township of Tenares, but incidentally when we met with the mayor of Tenares, he admitted he had never been to that village, even though he's from a small *campo* himself. To say that this village is isolated is an understatement.

The people of Sonador depend heavily on each other and try to take care of their families by raising cacao (cocoa), chickens, and pigs. Their small homes are very basic, and access to electricity is a "sometimes" event. To access a cell phone signal, residents climb up a large hill to call others. There aren't many sources for work, and if parents cannot afford to feed and clothe their children, the children are farmed out to other residents who feed them in exchange for the children's help with chores and minding smaller children. There is a one-room school that serves only up to grade two. Children in higher grades go to school in shifts due to scarce classroom space and they must travel to another village by pickup truck, crossing the river numerous times. If the river is high, they cannot attend. There are also frequent teacher walk-outs due to low pay. Many factors keep these students from attending often enough to get a very good education.

Pursuing higher education creates a whole other set of obstacles for the residents of Sonador. There aren't a lot of choices for college, and the trans-



portation difficulties and cost of tuition at the nearest but private university can be insurmountable. Incidentally at the La Universidad Católica Nordestana where we visited, educators are creating new programs that award associate degrees, since they found so many students cannot finish the full four-year programs. Poor preparation for college and family responsibilities also impede a young person determined to complete college. These students share much in common with many of our students at Durham Tech.

One of the many goals in higher education is to develop the “whole person.” Learning to understand and accept other cultures is key to success in this diverse world. Our own strategic initiative on globalization states that “Durham Tech embraces diversity and fosters the development of global citizens.” This includes the goals of “developing an understanding of global issues among our students and encouraging students to experience cultures other than their own” and “supporting the development of a local workforce ready to compete in a multinational environment” (“General Information,” 2009).

I believe that students and faculty of Durham Tech can help somewhat in the persistence toward those dreams of the Sonadorans, but at the same time, members of the Durham Tech community also can benefit greatly themselves. When returning faculty and students share the stories of the life and struggles of the Sonadorans and life in the Dominican Republic, our students can benefit in many ways. If we get Durham Tech students involved in fund-raisers or other activities that help them learn about life there, our students will grow. Although few Durham Tech students will actually get to visit the Dominican Republic themselves despite efforts to encourage study abroad, the benefits to our students at large who will never visit there can be great.

For all students who are involved, even second-hand, with the reciprocal culture, they can expect to receive the following benefits:

- 1) Students get exposed to a different culture than their own – learning to appreciate other cultures and learning that other cultures have value. They may even see how family or community life can be better, as an example.
- 2) Students get exposed to a different educational system and thereby better appreciate the one they have access to. Erin Riney, who taught in

the program Project DEgree, in which young at-risk students are given financial incentives for completing various goals along the way of completing their degree, was a member of the delegation. When she shared with her class some of the obstacles that Sonadorans had to overcome to even be able to attend classes, one of her students remarked on the contrast of the Sonadorans' struggles to her easy access to schooling and how she was rewarded for getting her education. Hopefully the effects on all of the Durham Tech students in that class are long-lasting.

- 3) Students gain an appreciation of the technological advantages they have and may put them to better use. Trying to communicate with folks in the Dominican Republic who have unreliable access to the Internet can help bring home this appreciation.
- 4) Students expand their comfort zone and grow beyond the narrow parameters of the culture they have been exposed to so far. College is all about broadening students' comfort zone and taking on new challenges, and students' exposure to life in the Dominican Republic can help them with this.
- 5) Students may be exposed to careers they may not have considered before, thereby expanding the possibilities for full and satisfying employment.
- 6) Students learn of the need for a global outlook, in business, in medicine, and in political systems. In this global world, if we don't help our students become more global, their skills in most technical and business areas will become obsolete. Global partnerships are vital for our students. As the executive summary from the Educating Leaders for a Global Society Report states, "Today's students will be working in a global marketplace and living in a global society. In order to succeed and to become leaders in this new world, they must acquire a far different set of knowledge, skills and perspectives than previous generations. They must be prepared to trade with, work alongside and communicate with persons from radically different backgrounds than their own. They must be trained to understand and confront complex new global threats, from terrorism to a global flu pandemic" (Bell-Rose & Desai, 2005, p. 2).

There will be even more benefits for students who actually travel to and spend some time in other cultures. Students who participate in international study abroad can expect to receive the following additional benefits:

- 1) Students will learn to understand the experience of being outside the dominant culture and perhaps have a further appreciation of the immigrant experience in the US.
- 2) Students will gain confidence in ability to travel and survive in a different culture than their own.
- 3) Students will mature in their own right and focus more on their academic growth. As Hadis (2005) reports of students who have returned from study abroad: "... they become more interested in academic issues, [and] participants are less often distracted by non-academic, age-related stimuli. Some educators refer to this process as a sign of maturation, and rightly so" (pp. 57-58).

The initial trip to the Dominican Republic can be the start of a new emphasis on our students having a more global emphasis in their education — one that they will find invaluable as students, employees, and citizens.

### References

- Bell-Rose, S, & Desai, V. (2005). *Educating leaders for a global society*. Retrieved from [http://asiasociety.org/files/GSF\\_EducatingLeaders.pdf](http://asiasociety.org/files/GSF_EducatingLeaders.pdf)
- General information. (2009). *Durham Technical Community College*. Retrieved from <http://durhamtech.edu/html/prospective/geninfo.htm>
- Hadis, B. (2005). Why are they better students when they come back? Determinants of academic focusing gains in the study abroad experience. *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad*, 11, 57-70. Retrieved from <http://www.frontiersjournal.com/documents/BFHadisFrontiersAug05.pdf>



## **Barn-Raising in a Global Village: How the Faculty Study Abroad Helped Me Rethink Cultural Literacy on Campus**

**Kerry Cantwell**

When Dr. Gomez-Joines called me one Friday afternoon in December 2010 to tell me that I was going to the Dominican Republic for a week, I had no idea what it really meant, where it would take me, how much it would change things. A few words cannot possibly explain what those seven days were for each of us who participated. I could sum this all up with some kind of Breakfast Club-style conclusion that in those seven days, we found out that each one of us is a parent, a foreigner, a free spirit, a teacher, a leader, and a caregiver, but that doesn't even begin to encompass it. For this forum, the most important lesson I learned during that mid-March week in the Dominican Republic (DR) is that our international students have a lot to teach us, and they deserve a lot more from us than they currently get.

In her groundbreaking book *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*, educator Ruby Payne (1996) writes that "The barn-raising metaphor for communities where citizens contribute to the building of the barn with their particular skills, gifts, and talents must replace the vending-machine metaphor, which is currently in use" (p. 182). This is where the faculty study tour to the DR fit for me. This was my chance to use my talents in this project to try to improve Durham Tech and the way we serve our students culturally as well as academically. The first item we need to look at, then, is what those cultural differences are. What are the talents and tools that international students bring to us?

The most obvious answer is the wonderful differences among our cultures, but one not-so-obvious point that we sometimes overlook is the importance of having those cultures celebrated in our midst. The cultural nuances that students bring to our campus provide a great deal of the flavor that makes the community college what it is. Many students, faculty, and staff prefer the community college environment over other colleges and universities because the students here are so different from each other. I have taught at colleges where all of my students were the same age, race, religion, political affiliation, and nationality, but the homogeny in those classes led to predictable discussions where all the opinions and experiences were the same,

and presenting the opposing perspective was considered “playing Devil’s advocate” rather than engaging in rational discourse. Students with unique life experiences provide us those unique perspectives often left unheard in a homogenous community.

Our time in the DR brought this to light simply by allowing us to experience first-hand some of those rich cultural differences that students bring with them to our classrooms. For example, we learned about how important national history is to students in the DR. In preparation for our trip, we read books and articles and watched films about the history of the nation. At one point, we discussed the impact of Columbus’s invasion of the island of Hispanola, but when we arrived, we met one Dominican who believed that Columbus was a saint and another who told us five minutes later that Columbus was *el Diablo* (the devil). They knew the long, torrid history of their nation and its island intimately and accepted it. Our Durham Tech group also withstood our hearts tearing in two as we pored over the pages of literature and historical criticism about the reign of dictator Rafael Trujillo and the relief felt by citizens when Trujillo was assassinated in 1961. When I asked my DR host mother, Marilú Taveras, about what the Dominican students knew of Trujillo, she assured me that students were taught well about the Trujillo regime and all of its evils. This was borne out in simple observations around the city of Tenares, which was our home base. Murals decorated many of the public and private building faces, but the art was not simply decorative; it was instructive as well. Images of Dominican heroes and scenes showing how communities overcome strife were common. The butterfly, a symbol of the three Mirabal sisters murdered under Trujillo’s regime, was featured in many of the murals, representing the need to fight for liberty and justice under unjust laws. In this way, we saw the importance of local and national history in their culture. We were forced to recognize that this richness of local and national histories comes with international students into our classrooms.

Our group took this brand of community cohesion quite seriously. We see the beginnings of it here in Durham with the downtown mural of civil rights advocate Pauli Murray and the development of the very-promising Museum of Durham History, but this cohesion is lacking in most other parts of our city and culture. We do not know nearly as much about our regional history as our Dominican hosts did theirs. However, the trip to the DR also showed us the ways in which Dominicans take care of each other. During our stay in Sonador, a small, mountain village in the north of the

country, my village host mother, Domenga, stopped a child on his way down the dirt road to ask him why he wasn't in school that day. After the child explained his school absence, Domenga explained to me that every adult is every child's parent in the village. They are their brothers' keepers, and this type of support has allowed great things to happen in that small village. We heard stories about a man donating a plot of land to a destitute neighbor, so she could farm it to raise money to support herself and her children; a community coming together to clean the village's water reservoir; and local parents raising the children of poorer families to ease the financial burden. This kind of community involvement also took place in the city of Tenares. My host mother Marilú is a significant force in the Tenares community. As the president of the local neighborhood association, Asociación de Juntas de Vecinos de Tenares (ASOJUVET), Marilú fights for the rights of local citizens to live freely with the basic amenities they deserve, like clean water, reliable electricity, and dependable roads. As of this printing, in 2011, Marilú has been on local Tenares TV and in the local newspapers no fewer than ten times, two of those while the Durham Tech group was present in Tenares. This activism and concern for her local community is widespread in the DR and should be encouraged here at Durham Tech. Such concern for our community could extend not only to our high-profile campus service projects, but also into our general attitude toward our students and fellow employees. We are already seeing the desire for this cohesion coming from our own students in the form of the White Building mural and the Student Senate's Civility Statement, but simple observation of Dominican culture on street-level allows us to learn lessons about how we treat each other and how we should treat each other. This tenet is also at the core of what we do at the community college in general. We are our brothers' keepers, and it is our job to provide our fellows in the community with the academic and career resources that they deserve.

Our time in the Dominican Republic also taught me something most people claim they already know, but not until one is in a culturally alienating situation does one realize that the purported understanding was entirely superficial: the importance of appreciating and learning from our differences. I had fancied myself an open-minded, educated, worldly person, but placed into this foreign culture that I did not understand, I was, quite frankly, drowning. My limited Spanish skills left me feeling even more helpless. Many of us believe we are culturally aware, but not until we become "other" do we understand what this means viscerally. I had a lot to learn about being the "other." For the first couple of days, all that was different was

scary, until it wasn't; it became interesting. Figuring out how to behave appropriately was also difficult; I only learned through observation and careful analysis. Why did that gentleman grab my forearm instead of shaking hands with me? Why did Marilú appear angry when I didn't eat more? Now why is she yelling at me? Why does my host-sister keep telling me how much she likes my purse? Why was I served vegetables but Peter Wooldridge got chicken? Why don't I speak Spanish better? The tears fell quietly in private more than once that week.

Now, let's shift this to our international students: in the classroom, I assume that all of my students know that they should raise their hands if they have questions, that they should speak up in order to be heard, that they should stay seated during class, that they should not speak while another is speaking. When they don't abide by these standards, I am often irritated. Ruby Payne has been writing about this very problem for nearly twenty years. Payne claims that this is actually a problem of what she calls the "hidden rules" of class, but it also applies in a broader cultural context. Each class or, in this case, culture has its own set of rules that outsiders don't know or understand, ensuring their status as outsiders or "other." Payne & Kraybill (2002) state in *Hidden Rules of Class at Work* that these "hidden rules are those unspoken, cueing mechanisms used to determine whether you do or do not belong. Often these rules are absolute and are used to define intelligence." This is a great risk in our classrooms considering that in 2010, 715 students, more than ten percent of our curriculum enrollment, were "international" students (Offen, 2010). This means that as many as ten percent of our students might be outsiders to our expectations. They may not have access to an understanding of how we, in the American South, think a college student should behave. We expect students to ask questions, but in some Asian cultures, this is considered offensive, so international students may suffer in silence. We expect students to be quiet while other students are speaking, but in some African cultures, the only person in the classroom worthy of respect is the instructor, so some of our students may appear exceedingly rude and disrespectful of their classmates. This is not intentional; it is customary. In the DR, I offended my host mother Marilú one day by not eating lunch as soon as I got home. Later, when I didn't eat the egg salad I was served in the village of Sonador, Domenga assumed that I didn't like her cooking and looked very hurt. This was not the case; I was actually suffering from dehydration and was unable to clearly communicate my illness. Regardless, by not eating the egg salad, I had offended my hostess until, after trying it, I was able to praise her amazing work in the kitchen.

On our last day in Sonador, our coordinator, LeAnne Disla, informed us that we needed to stop on the way out of the village to visit with a family she knew who lived on the outskirts high up on a hill—a fifteen-minute hike uphill through the weakly-trailed forest. The family had heard of our arrival a few days earlier and was offended that LeAnne had not yet come to visit: they had been expecting us for two days now. This Dominican custom was unknown to us but could have caused LeAnne serious problems on future visits had we not stopped in. We had now been placed in the same situations that our students are placed in every day until they learn through experience the adaptations necessary to “belong” (Payne & Krabill, 2002). In trying to discern how we adapt, we need to acknowledge that behavior can be broken into three groups: cultural, individual, and universal (La Brack, 2009). It is the monumental task of international students, as they observe behaviors, to determine on the fly into which of these three categories the behaviors fall. This is more than we need or ought to ask of them.

On our first day in the Dominican Republic, these differences were alarming for me. I did not know that I should greet every person in a room individually. I did not know that I should neither eat all the food on my plate nor leave anything untouched. Once LeAnne filled me in on these customs, I found the culture quite charming and warm, but up to that point, I felt lonely and trapped, even in the company of my six Durham Tech companions. By helping me adjust to the expectations, LeAnne opened a lot of doors of understanding for me. These are the same expectations, or “rules,” that Payne says separate classes. In this situation, however, the classes were cultural rather than economic. We need to provide explicit guidelines to our students explaining what is expected of them, not just for the benefit of our international students, but also for the benefit of our homeschooled students, our first-generation college students, our non-traditional students. Understanding these cultural differences helps a lonely, marginalized student feel welcomed and understood, comfortable and grounded.

Durham Tech’s Vision Statement and Strategic Goals and Initiatives helped build a firm framework for our trip to the DR. The college’s Vision Statement directs us toward valuable experiences in globalization for everyone at the College. However, if our Vision includes “empowering learners to enrich... global communities” (“General Information,” 2009), then we need to spend as much time with the globe as we can. This is not a new idea. Gary Althen, in his 1988 book *American Ways: A Guide for Foreigners in the United States*, touches directly on why this is so difficult for Americans. He does not



attempt to explain WHY Americans do the things they do; he only points out the things they do that might appear peculiar to international visitors. This book, while a valuable resource for international visitors, is also invaluable for Americans who might not realize that their behaviors are unique to their own culture, that their ideas and customs are not universal. For example, Americans have increasingly pronounced ideas about privacy. They desire their own space, their own belongings, and their own time to themselves. The late anthropologist Edward T. Hall (1990) discusses this very thing in his book *The Hidden Dimension*, in which he points out that, for Americans, “as soon as a person stops or is seated in a public place, there balloons around him a small sphere of privacy which is considered inviolate” (p. 155). American culture also treasures the idea that all men are created equal, which is the concept that leads restaurant servers to introduce themselves by their first names (Althen, 1988, p. 10). Americans are also somewhat unique in their adherence to punctuality and desire to not waste time. All of these things may frustrate or confuse the international student. In his final pieces of advice, Althen (1988) states, “Remember that most Americans are poorly informed about other countries and about the way their own country is viewed by foreigners” (p. 166). While this has changed a bit since September 11, 2001, the truth is that, while we have more contact with students from other countries than ever before, the majority of our native students are still extremely insular with respect to interactions with people different from themselves.

Althen (1988), in fact, goes on to give a nudge to foreign visitors to take advantage of this opportunity to teach Americans a little something: “Perceiving yourself as a teacher can help you remain patient... in the face of the many seemingly stupid questions Americans are likely to ask you, and which are often based on stereotypes, misinformation, or no information at all” (p. 166). While this seems to be Althen’s way of taking a swing at Americans, this is not his intention by any means. In fact, Payne and Krabill (2002) support this very statement insofar as it might relate to many of our students: they state that the lowest two levels of economic class—generationally impoverished and the working class—only see the world in terms of their immediate communities, perhaps as large as their city or state, but not much beyond that. The middle class sees the world only in terms of national setting. The two “highest” classes economically are those that Payne and Krabill call “new money” and “old money” (p. 58); these classes see the world beyond the United States’ borders. This is not a very significant quotient of our student body. The majority of our students fall into the

more local and national views of the world. This is precisely why a global vision is so important for our students. In the last several years, we have seen the impact on our own economy of global politics ("Arab Spring" revolutions, terrorism around the globe, oil price fluctuations) and global economics (Greece, Ireland, Argentina, and Iraq, among them). This global vision becomes more and more important if we want students to have a firm grasp on even their own local politics. For example, how are the increasingly violent drug cartel wars in Mexico and South America affecting our growing immigrant population in Durham? Empowering learners to enrich global communities means encouraging students to be flexible, accommodating, and compassionate in their interactions with students from different backgrounds, but we can't empower our students and community in this way without exposing them deliberately to these other cultures, customs, languages, and ideas.

What does all of this mean to our international students at Durham Tech? It means that we may have been doing them a disservice by not providing them as many services and opportunities as they need. They deserve explanations about why we are doing the things we do in the classroom, how to behave in class, what appropriate communications in American culture look like, and how to get through our degree programs as welcomed students integrating into the student body. What they also deserve is a chance to teach us about themselves and their cultures, and a chance to feel some of the comforts of home. If I were in Paris, I would want the opportunity to speak English or hear English now and again and share some of the customs of my homeland and have them be respected for the value they hold to me. Granted, our students do not live on campus and they do not spend as much time on campus as they do off it, but they still deserve the same welcoming learning environment that we promise in the Strategic Goals.

First of all, our international students deserve a proper introduction to American culture in general and Durham Tech culture specifically. Our introduction to Dominican culture was relatively piecemeal rather than formal, and this created a great deal of confusion for me when we arrived in the DR. I, for one, was not ready to kiss strangers on the cheek upon first meeting them. I was also not prepared to be left alone to eat my meals at the dining table at which no one else ate: family members ate their meals in the kitchen where food preparation took place. I was a guest of honor and was allowed to eat whenever I wanted, so the family did not inform me when they would be dining. In hindsight, it was very charming for them to treat

me with so much respect, but at the time, I was extremely lonely. The experience was not without value, however: when I could not identify the food I was eating, I was able to simply enjoy it for its taste and texture, rather than holding preconceived notions from my own food hang-ups. For example, I had no idea I would ever desire another bite of fresh hard-boiled eggs, but Domenga made it happen by leaving me alone at the dining table with four dishes of delicious, unidentifiable food in front of me. (I do credit my parents with raising me to be flexible and appreciative of whatever is put in front of me.) A formal introduction to Dominican culture might have better prepared me for my dining solitude, but I still found value in the experience.

There are many ways that a cultural introduction could be handled. First of all, international students could be given an introductory pamphlet by the Center for the Global Learner when they first enroll at Durham Tech and meet with their international student advisor. The University of California at Berkeley International Office provides incoming international students with a helpful pamphlet that includes information about personal safety as well as some pointers about the stages of culture shock and suggestions for adjusting. Some of the information is about how basic systems function in the US and is aimed at students who are just arriving in the US specifically to attend UC-Berkeley (how the US Postal System works, how to make a phone call in the US, how to learn to drive). While our students may not fit into this category, there are some for whom life circumstances (recent separation or divorce, death of a spouse, etc.) may lead them to need such information as how to open a bank account or find a place to live. UC-Berkeley also offers students more specific campus information. For example, students receive a brief, basic introduction to campus safety and avoiding scam artists, as well as more personal information like laws governing domestic violence and child abuse and available support services. Simply making such information available is enough to get an international student started at acclimating to American culture and also provides them with resources that help make the College a community that students can trust and a place where they can find comfort.

Next, we could introduce students to our college culture with the ACA 122 course. All incoming program students with fewer than twelve college credits are required to take ACA 122 (College Success). This course provides students with a cursory glance at what being a college student in the US and at Durham Tech will mean with respect to homework, tuition costs, GPA,



study skills, etc., but a section of ACA specifically dedicated to incoming international students could allow the First-Year Experience instructors to provide the cultural scaffolding that these new students need. For example, as mentioned earlier, students from some Asian communities are taught that it is rude to ask questions of the instructor in class, so many students suffer in silence when they don't understand something that takes place in the classroom. Rarely, they will stay after class to ask their questions privately out of respect for the instructor's time and authority in the classroom. While most of us have no problem with students staying after class to ask questions, I, for one, was saddened to discover that a student of mine had been confused all semester about something simple because she was trained to believe it rude to seek clarification—requesting clarity implied that the instructor was not good at his or her job. I had not stressed to her enough that asking questions during the lecture was encouraged. A primer in American college classroom culture may have alleviated her confusion and frustration. Thomas Brown (2011), a leader in the First-Year Experience movement and former Vice President of the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA), argues that international students “enter and engage a new country, culture and educational system that is often alien to their home country experiences and [they] require a new set of cultural competencies to succeed.” It is precisely these cultural competencies that Brown has sought to communicate by developing first-year programs across the country for specific demographic groups like international students. A demographically-specific section of ACA 122 might be the tool that we need to meet international students in a way that is most effective at ensuring their college success at Durham Tech.

Yet another of Durham Tech's strategic goals is “Developing an understanding of global issues among our students and encouraging students to experience cultures other than their own” (“General Information,” 2009). The methods we use to facilitate this goal are varied and many are already in place, but there is always room for growth. Brown (2011) borrows from Laura Renden when he proposes that “Success appears to be contingent on whether faculty can validate students in an academic or interpersonal way. Even the most non-traditional student can be transformed through in- and out-of-class validation.” I would argue that we should be validating students not only academically and interpersonally, but also culturally. When I first arrived at Durham Tech in 2001 as a writing tutor and part-time Developmental English instructor, the school hosted a Saponi Powwow honoring Native American culture. The event was well-attended and informative for

the entire Durham Tech community. The Powwow represented the College's openness to celebrating different cultures and art forms. This spirit could be resurrected in the forms of campus festivals celebrating different continents or cultures individually. Durham Tech has previously used WinterFest to celebrate the cultures of our planet. Unfortunately, this event has not been continued and has instead been combined with Earth Day in recent years, which takes away any cultural authenticity the event might have originally possessed. One option for increasing students' cultural validation on campus would be to provide them with small festivals of music, food, and arts that would take place on a weekend and be open to the public for a nominal admission fee.

While such organizational efforts may seem gargantuan, the College has hosted similar events before; but perhaps smaller, student-driven efforts could be devised. For example, Dr. Elizabeth Penton, in her summation of the Spring 2011 ASUT Capstone Course service learning project, reported that one of the cultural elements that international students miss the most was the significance of the midday meal in American culture. Today, most staff and faculty at Durham Tech (and American office workers in general) eat our midday meals at our desks so that we can continue to work. Some states allow companies to not even offer lunch breaks during the day. Penton (2011) argues that the loss of the shared, home-cooked midday meal costs students emotionally and physically:

The discourse on problems and solutions of the day applies language skills and critical thinking. New topics are broached. Old-age wisdom from multi-generational members of the family is shared. And, not least, high quality local foods are prepared and served in a stress-busting atmosphere. In two or three hours, many needs are met, including re-energizing and the development of new perspectives within a framework of emotional support. (Penton, 2011)

The midday meal in America has gone the way of the goony bird since the availability of cheap electric light made it unnecessary for workers to get all of their eating and working done during daylight hours (McMillan, 2001). The development of the American industrial culture in the late 1800s combined with the advent of the availability of public transit and the automobile in the early half of the Twentieth Century reinforced this demotion in America of the midday meal at home to a simple lunch break at one's desk. Workers no longer trekked home to spend an hour or so with their families.

Women no longer spent the morning cooking elaborate spreads of meats and vegetables. The midday meal was replaced by the evening meal as the opportunity to share one's daily problems, joys, and accomplishments.

However, this culture of a large midday meal has persisted outside the US. Our experiences in the DR bore out this idea: in the village of Sonador, the lunch was usually several different dishes beautifully presented to me by Domenga: a green salad, rice and beans, and an egg salad or boiled vegetable dish. In the city of Tenares, lunch was sometimes composed of MANY dishes of varying types for us: fruit, rice, beans, fish, salads, followed by a relaxing cup of sweet coffee. It was never a simple sandwich, or a cup of soup, or a granola bar and a bag of Doritos. Lunch was a chance to relax and be calm and regroup before going back out into the world to complete the day. This is the expectation with which our international students arrive on our campus.

Unfortunately, this is not what they get when they arrive on American college campuses. One 2010 study of Dominican students at Western Michigan University and the University of Colorado indicated that one of the most disappointing elements of their lives in a US college was "the limited, uninteresting dining options" (Urban, Orbe, Tavares, & Alvarez, 2010, p. 238). Their limited food options were reported to be a significant source of stress and made acclimating to American culture more difficult.

For this reason, our students deserve an opportunity to enjoy their own food and customs on our campus while, at the same time, teaching us about their cultures and helping our native students to become part of this global community. Most of our students do not have the means to venture outside the borders of this country; some don't even venture beyond North Carolina's borders. However, we live in one of the most culturally diverse areas in the country, courtesy of such highly ranked universities as Duke and UNC-Chapel Hill, and the presence of over 170 multinational corporations in the Research Triangle Park. As a community college, this is an opportunity for us to explore, honor, and continue to develop our ever-changing community. We deserve the exposure as much as our international students do.

Durham Tech has long been seen as a source for skill-development and affordable higher education in this area. We serve the counties of Orange and Durham. According to the US Census Bureau (2011), these two coun-

ties total over 400,000 people, 12.6% of whom are foreign-born. Most of our residents travel only about 22 minutes to get to work. We stay close to home. We stay within our borders, but we come from everywhere: ninety-five countries are represented on Durham Tech's campuses (Offen, 2010). It is high time that we decided to learn about them.

Here, we return to Ruby Payne and her barn-raising metaphor. We should be taking advantage of the skills and talents of our international students, allowing them to use their skills and talents to teach us about the world outside our borders and to contribute to our own culture. As we continue to build the barn of our community by helping students develop "an understanding of global issues" and by "encouraging students to experience cultures other than our own," as I was permitted to do in the DR, there is no better method to reach that Strategic Goal than to allow our international students to share their rich customs and cultural gifts on our campus while we provide the scaffolding for their acclimation to US American society ("General Information," 2009).

## References

- Althen, G. (1988). *American ways: A guide for foreigners in the United States*. Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press, Inc.
- Berkeley International Office. (2010). Arrival guide for international students and scholars. *University of California, Berkeley*. Retrieved from [http://internationaloffice.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/shared/docs/arrival\\_guidebook.pdf](http://internationaloffice.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/shared/docs/arrival_guidebook.pdf)
- Brown, T. (2011, January 24). Strengthening community in support of increased learning, engagement and success for diverse students. *Santa Monica College*. [http://www.smc.edu/HumanResources/HumanResourcesDepartment/Documents/SMC\\_Diversity\\_Workshop\\_Classroom\\_Focus\\_01.24.2011.pdf](http://www.smc.edu/HumanResources/HumanResourcesDepartment/Documents/SMC_Diversity_Workshop_Classroom_Focus_01.24.2011.pdf)
- General information. (2009). *Durham Technical Community College*. Retrieved from <http://durhamtech.edu/html/prospective/geninfo.htm>
- Hall, E. T. (1990). *The hidden dimension*. New York, NY: Anchor Books.

- La Brack, B. (2009). What's up with culture? *On-Line Cultural Training Resource for Study Abroad* Retrieved from <http://www2.pacific.edu/sis/culture/index.htm>
- McMillan, S. (2001, October-November). What time is dinner? *History Magazine*. Retrieved from <http://www.history-magazine.com/dinner2.html>
- Offen, N. (2010, May 16). Durham Tech attracts more international students. *The Herald-Sun*. Retrieved from [http://www.heraldsun.com/view/full\\_story\\_news\\_durham/7450232/article-Durham-Tech-attracts-more-international-students?instance=main\\_article](http://www.heraldsun.com/view/full_story_news_durham/7450232/article-Durham-Tech-attracts-more-international-students?instance=main_article)
- Payne, R. K. (1996). *A framework for understanding poverty*. Highlands, TX: aha! Process, Inc.
- Payne, R. K., & Kraybill, D. (2002). *Hidden rules of class at work*. Highlands, TX: aha! Process, Inc.
- Penton, E. (2011). Feast, families, and feminism: Voices from our international students.
- Urban, E.L., Orbe, M.P., Tavares, N.A. & Alvarez, W. (2010). Exploration of Dominican international students' experiences. *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice*, 47(2), 233–250. doi:10.2202/1949-6605.6081. Retrieved from <http://journals.naspa.org/jsarp/vol47/iss2/art6/>
- US Census Bureau. (2011, June 3). State and county quick facts: Durham County, North Carolina. *US Census Bureau*. Retrieved from <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/37/37063.html>
- US Census Bureau. (2011, June 3). State and county quick facts: Orange County, North Carolina. *US Census Bureau*. Retrieved from <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/37/37135.html>

## The Impact of Faculty Study Abroad on the Globalization of the Curriculum

Peter Wooldridge

The Center for the Global Learner (CGL) at Durham Technical Community College seeks to “lead... and collaborate... with all areas of the college community to foster intercultural understanding and the development of engaged global citizens” (“Center for the Global Learner,” 2010). One of the established strategic goals in support of this mission is to “develop an understanding of global issues among... students and encourage students to experience cultures other than their own” (“Center for the Global Learner,” 2010). This article explores the reasons for an emphasis on global awareness and describes the outcomes of a faculty study abroad experience to the Dominican Republic in March 2011.

A focus on globalization is common in the mission statements and strategic plans developed by higher education institutions in the United States. This focus, while necessary to initiate conversations about curricular changes, is not sufficient to explain the benefits of globalizing the curriculum. An institutional emphasis on globalization is useful only when a deeper cross-curricular conversation is undertaken to understand what is gained when we infuse curricula with topics, experiences, and concepts that focus on decoding cultural dynamics, analyzing global relationships, and transforming individual world views.

Current demographic data point to a dramatic reshaping of our cultural identity. For example, for the first time in the nation's history, the birthrate for the Hispanic population in the United States has exceeded the birthrate of the white non-Hispanic population. In fact, at current birth rates, several states, including North Carolina, will experience a shift from a white non-Hispanic statistical majority to a Hispanic statistical majority within the next ten years (Day, n.d.).

At the same time, technological advances allow us to easily and spontaneously interact with people in many areas of the world, effectively erasing boundaries of space and time. This may, in turn, drive a recalibration of the ingroup/outgroup dynamic exacerbated in a world in which the “other” is not often encountered, and so, not well understood.



It may also be true that other forms of identification will increasingly outweigh national identification. This growing struggle is reflected in the ongoing attempts to regulate religious dress in several European countries (Harney, 2011).

Additionally, problems that are global in nature (e.g., changing weather patterns, pandemics, economic woes) are highlighting our common concerns. Increasingly, we are coming to understand that we must find a way to manage our global “commons” if we want to experience an increase in the global standard of living. The recent earthquake, tsunami, and resulting nuclear meltdown in Japan are reminders of this emergent reality (Sieg, 2011). The adequate globalization of a curriculum must rely on access to technology, as well as local, state, regional, and international partnerships. There must also be a willingness to both commit and share resources. Perhaps most importantly, appropriately prepared “guides” (faculty and administrators) with clearly defined learning outcomes must be available to drive instructional changes.

Preparation of these “guides” in the globalization process is, ultimately, built on a belief in the value of the “other.” A belief in the value of the “other” is most genuinely built on an immersion in the life experiences of the “other.” Study abroad provides this experience.

In March 2011, the Center for the Global Learner at Durham Technical Community College sponsored a seven-day faculty study abroad experience to the Dominican Republic. The experience prompted a host of multi-layered insights that continue to be explored. All of the participants have reported a dramatic shift in their frame of reference as it relates to their own cultural, social, economic, and educational experiences. This shift in frame of reference, in turn, has impacted instructional methodologies and provided a set of rich and genuine real world examples for use in the classroom. Participants have been developing instructional materials that can be disseminated across the curriculum. For example, an interview with Dedé Mirabal, whose three sisters were assassinated during the dictatorship of Rafael Trujillo, is being edited for use as an instructional resource, and faculty participants are using visual images from the trip as instructional materials.

The trip has also prompted the development of an institutional partnership described in the introduction of this edition, and an emerging relationship

between the Durham community and the consortium of Dominican artists with whom the group visited during their time in the country. The Director of the Center for the Global Learner traveled to the Dominican Republic during October 2011 to solidify an agreement between the two institutions, and the CGL helped to host a second trip to Durham by the artists in November 2011.

While some of the consequences of study abroad could be anticipated, some could not. The experience provided an unusual opportunity for the development of significant professional relationships that most faculty and staff rarely enjoy. In fact, as time passed, the group became a dynamic unit that engaged in a meta-analysis of the experience as it unfolded. The consequence of this meta-analysis has been an increase in opportunities for creative and innovative collaboration at both an institutional and international level. Examples include a curricular partnership initiated by one member of the group with the nursing school of Universidad Católica Nordestana, a university located in the northern part of the country, and the examination by another member of ways to leverage technology to provide real time classroom interactions between Durham Tech students and students in the Dominican Republic.

The expansion of this experience continues. A second trip is being planned for March 2012 that will include both faculty “guides” and Durham Tech students. The experience will be tied to a humanities course (HUM 180 International Cultural Exploration) and the instructor will incorporate elements from the March 2011 trip into the course material. An effort to identify opportunities for faculty and administrator exchange has also begun, and the college is seeking new ways to continue to support and encourage the relationship between the Durham community and the Dominican Republic artist group.

A truly globalized curriculum can only be realized through a globalized faculty and student body. The challenge is to find meaningful ways to achieve this in a manner that is both scalable and sustainable.



## References

- Center for the Global Learner. (2010). *Durham Technical Community College*. Retrieved from <http://www.durhamtech.edu/cgl/mission.htm>
- Day, J. C. (n.d.). Population profile of the United States: National population projections. *US Census Bureau*. Retrieved from <http://www.census.gov/population/www/pop-profile/natproj.html>
- Harney, J. S. (2010, May 17). Should the French veil ban concern the west? *Huffington Post*. Retrieved from [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jehan-s-harney/should-the-french-veil-ba\\_b\\_579360.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jehan-s-harney/should-the-french-veil-ba_b_579360.html)
- Sieg, L. (2011, March 30). Analysis: Nuclear crisis carries big risks for Japan economy. Retrieved from <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/03/30/us-japan-nuclear-impact-idUSTRE72T26H20110330>

## Stories from the Dominican Republic

Kasey Jordan

“So that is how to create a single story: show a people as one thing, as only one thing, over and over again, and that is what they become.”

– Chimamanda Adichie

I scrolled excitedly through the pictures on my digital camera, “Look at this... this was the bathroom... and here is the kitchen... see how you can see through the walls?” My poor husband, who probably had not had time to process any of the images, just nodded his head and squinted at the screen. We were looking through pictures from my recent trip to the rural village of Sonador in the Dominican Republic, and I realized I was not satisfied with the snapshots I had collected. It was all there: the bathrooms that seemed to me more like holes in the ground, the beds laced with mosquito netting, and the dogs that looked so malnourished I was sure they would soon collapse. I scrolled faster, though, because I knew there was more. Finally, I came to a picture that told a different part of the story. This one featured a local woman from the village, surrounded by the women from Durham Tech all flashing newly painted fingernails. This creative and ambitious woman planned to start her own business in the beauty industry. The sweet yellow church came next, with its impressive new sound system purchased by the community in tribute to a valued aspect of their culture. Then came the home of a tenacious woman who had built a thriving garden on some of the most difficult soil in the village and then the children of the man who organized trips for local residents to get medical care in the city. I realized the injustice of telling only a “single story” of Sonador. Since coming home, the concept of “story” has guided the integration of my experiences in the classroom.

Durham Technical Community College has a mission to “enrich students’ lives and the broader community through teaching, learning, and service.” I can say without hesitation that the powerful stories I connected with while in the Dominican Republic have equipped me to better fulfill this mission. I teach nursing, and nurses place great emphasis on holistic care-giving. It is not enough to simply administer a medication or execute a procedure; nurses must do so within the context of a relationship with the patient. Patients range from individuals to families to entire communities, and they

all have many stories. I believe that teaching students to recognize and respect these stories is one of the most important things that I do. Telling stories from my own experience as a nurse has been a successful teaching method, and the addition of personal stories relating to a culture different than my own has been welcomed by my students. I look forward to discussing the content related to health systems with my students this fall, perhaps including the story of the hospital and health care team in the city of Tenares. This hospital stood empty except for the emergency room, waiting an unspecified amount of time for the government to finish remodeling. Meanwhile, the health care team competently handles horrific emergencies without the security of high tech equipment or a team of specialists. I realize I must tell these stories carefully, not painting an entire picture in one color. The broadening of my own horizons has led to the development of my teaching, and in turn the enrichment of my students' experiences.

I believe that continued personal learning and service by educators is fundamental to quality teaching. While I learned a great deal about the government and politics of the Dominican Republic, its health care system, and the health of its people, I believe some of the most important knowledge I have gained through this trip has come since being back home. The diversity I experienced while abroad has reminded me to remain open to the many stories in the Triangle area. My students have a wealth of stories to be recognized and shared. I am able to serve them better when I learn their stories, and they become more holistic nurses through sharing. I have been reminded that the stories from home deserve just as much caution and respect as do stories from abroad.

I am thankful for my time in the Dominican Republic and the beautiful people who hosted us so graciously. I hope to do justice to their willingness to share their lives with a group of Durham Tech faculty. Adichie has noted, "I've always felt that it was impossible to engage properly with a place or a person without engaging with all of the stories of that place and that person. The consequence of the single story is this, it robs people of dignity." As Durham Tech continues onward in fulfilling its mission, I am grateful for the emphasis placed on creating new experiences for faculty and students. Engaging in more stories, both abroad and at home, will no doubt help us grow personally and accomplish our mission as a community college. Durham Tech has more stories to tell.

## References

Adichie, C. (2009). The danger of a single story [Video file]. Retrieved from <http://blog.ted.com/2010/12/24/nine-stories-a-tedtalks-playlist/>

## **On Democracy: What a Developing Country had to Teach Someone from the Heart of the Free World**

**Erin Riney**

On our first night in Sonador, a small village in the heart of the Dominican Republic, I was awoken by the honking of a horn. While that doesn't seem particularly notable to those who've lived in urban areas, this was odd in Sonador for several reasons. First, I knew of only two vehicles in the entire town. What were the chances that one of them had reason to be out and about at 3:30 in the morning? Second, the thin clapboard walls of the houses gaped, and the light and noise of a truck passing 15 feet from my head at 3:30 in the morning were striking enough an occurrence in a town of two vehicles that the honking seemed like overkill. Third, the truck returned half an hour later with the same routine.

Through several translated conversations the next day, an inspiring explanation unfolded. Chide, one of the community's residents, had come through town to collect six other Sonador residents to make the several hour trip to Santiago for free medical services. The group had left before dawn in order to be among the first in line in order to increase their chances of receiving care. The group returned that evening to report wonderful success: one person had undergone a procedure to uncross his eyes (a common occurrence in the villages), and several others received eye exams and glasses. All told, the group received almost \$30,000 worth of care for free.

The outcome of this story is significant, but the effort was what inspired me. Health care is difficult to obtain in rural DR due to a shortage of facilities, a lack of public health education, and the common poverty. It wasn't unusual for folks in Sonador to need care, and it was impressive that Chide didn't feel overwhelmed by these clear needs but instead felt compelled to do what he could to help.

I remember a day in my undergraduate philosophy class when we explored the idea of selflessness and whether true altruism ever existed. It seemed to me that Chide's act was one of the closest affirmative arguments for the existence of selfless actions that I'd personally witnessed. Chide had given up his entire day. He hadn't gone seeking medical care for himself. The trip was

difficult. Back home, I've ridden on unplanned farm "roads" that are in much better condition than the main thoroughfares to and from the DR villages. The trip must have been jarring and uncomfortable, especially with so many squeezed into the double cab of the truck. And the cost of gas to and from Santiago seemed a significant proportion of Chide's weekly income, given what we had recently learned about the low price of cacao since the passage of NAFTA. No, Chide taking Sonador residents to Santiago was not like me offering a ride in the United States. It was much more expensive, difficult, and time-consuming. And the fact that there were no guarantees of medical attention made Chide's act even more generous. He had no guarantee that his efforts would result in anything. The line could have already been too long. The event could have been canceled. With no assurances that anything would come of the trip, all of Chide's exertion could have been for naught.

News of the trip spread among us Americans. The fact that Chide's benevolence was so inspiring to us gave me pause. As I would come to understand, Chide's action wasn't unusual for Sonador or even for the Dominican Republic. It was odd for America. While I'm sure there are folks in the US who go to extremes to help another person, I was hard pressed to think of many examples. As Paul Rogat Loeb (2010) notes in his book *The Soul of a Citizen*, Americans often live with an "illusion of powerlessness," since our "predominant culture insists that little we do can matter" (p. 31). Coupled with America's prevailing desensitization and indifference toward social problems, this illusion of powerlessness fuels a formidable cynicism that "exempts us from any broader responsibilities to our fellow human beings" (p. 83). It was hard to imagine the typical American, saddled with such cynicism, undertaking tantamount efforts. Really, who did I know who would expend comparable personal resources to help someone without a guarantee of success? Would I?

In our week's trip, I saw numerous other examples of Dominicans improving the world around them by helping their neighbors. However, my ability to see the importance of this civic engagement was at first clouded by my American perspective. When we first arrived in the DR, all I could see were deficiencies. A lack of running water in the middle class home we stayed in. A lack of transportation for our host family. No indoor plumbing in the *campo*, the rural villages. A lack of infrastructure—paved roads, garbage collection, and dependable services—like teachers showing up to teach on a school day. In fact, it's hard to see anything but deficiencies when you go

from daily showers in your tiled, middle-class American tub to scooping your bath water in the DR from an old pickle bucket and dumping it on your head with the bottom of a Gatorade container. Add in a language barrier and unfamiliarity with the culture, and it was very easy to judge Dominicans by our American standards. There was want in the DR, and the absences of daily comforts and what I considered necessities were glaring.

Thankfully, our study tour wasn't a voyeuristic vacation. We dined, lived, gathered, and played with Dominicans. Once we settled into a new normal, I began taking the DR on its terms. And that's when I realized that the true resources in the Dominican were the people and their willingness to help their fellow Dominicans. We Americans had much to learn. I never forgot that the middle class house we stayed in was on a dirt road despite being in the middle of the city. Or that our pit stop for a glimpse of the beach revealed a bay full of debris and swirling chemicals. However, the more I got to know the Dominican people, I was able to see those imperfections in a larger perspective, a master narrative in which the DR was the standard against which the US fell short. The tables turned, and the role of exemplar now belonged to the DR.

My first realization of my American deficiencies can be traced to the outskirts of the Sonador village when we walked past the home of Yolanda and learned her story. Yolanda's husband had left her when her children were very young. She had no home, no income, and no family, which put her in a rare situation, as there was no one to take her in. We were told matter of factly that most women in that position turn to prostitution. However, Yolanda didn't have to. Her neighbors realized her situation and came together to find a solution. They gifted her a small piece of overgrown, hilly land on the edge of town, which Yolanda cleared by hand with a machete. She learned to grow food in the sloping terrain. Someone gave her some scraps of material, and Yolanda learned to make rugs with the fabric pieces. Slowly, Yolanda made enough money to build a humble house for herself and her family. Her children went to school.

As we toured the village, I noticed almost every home had one of Yolanda's rugs on the floor. And almost every person passing by on horse cushioned the ride with one of Yolanda's rugs. Sure, the prevalence of Yolanda's handiwork might have been a matter of available goods or a cheap price, but to me the rugs symbolized that initial act of the village when they decided to do something about a problem they saw. I have one of her rugs hanging in



my office to remind me of Sonador's example—their act of taking care of their own, not ignoring a problem and hoping that someone else would deal with it. To me, the rug symbolizes the power of a community in action.

I thought of the many reasons Americans don't involve themselves in similar helpful acts. We often think of service as a zero-sum venture—that we have to lose something if we're going to help someone else. We don't invest in our neighbors because we think it will only deplete our own account. We think of all the reasons not to help: we're too busy, we're raising kids, we're focusing on our careers, or we don't want to get involved in something that might get complicated. But the residents of Sonador had excuses, too, and theirs were questions of assets, not personal preferences. The village didn't have a paved road, K-8 schooling, or a sewage system. They held limited financial resources to fund a solution for Yolanda. But what they had was real community. The people and their resourcefulness were their wealth. Perhaps because their community was so small, they could have the foresight to more clearly see that when one person suffers, everyone suffers in the end. Whatever their motivations, what was clear during our trip was that time and time again, Dominicans chose to get involved and help. The people were the best resource the country had.

This social capital evidenced everywhere we went. In Tenares, we met with an artist collective that helps the community define its past, present, and collective future by representing those ideas on the walls of the community's buildings, sparking conversations and action about communal values, needs, and goals. Through the artists collective, we met another man who informally leads a small agriculture initiative for sustainable farming, one of the first in the Dominican Republic. In discussing the condition and treatment of displaced Haitians in the DR, it was revealed that this man lived the proverbial adage, "Give a man a fish, and he'll eat for a day. Teach a man to fish and he'll eat for a lifetime." By US standards, this man didn't have much to share, but he worked to educate Haitians and give them the tools for a better future, even giving them a valuable hog in order to teach the refugees how to plan for food and breed animals. His house was small and similar to the spartan homes in Sonador. It seemed clear that he didn't have disposable income, and the money he could have made from selling the hog could have been significant. He didn't feel threatened by these newcomers to his country, but instead welcomed them with gifts and resources. In comparison, I felt a bit ashamed. In my daily life, when I'm blessed enough to be able to go out



to eat just because I don't feel like cooking dinner, do I ever make such significant sacrifices to help someone else?

America may have numerous financial assets, but there's a shortage of this charitable communal spirit, despite clear demand. We often skirt the burdens of community life while freely joining in the benefits of its paved roads, publicly educated populace, and safe streets. But a democracy can't be strong when most citizens feel they fulfill their civic duties by paying taxes and voting every four years.

Perhaps the thing I learned most in the DR is to see Americans as dependent, especially on our government to take care of those less fortunate. It seems we broker our shared responsibilities through government activity. Many people who criticize Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) say its recipients are dependent on government handouts and argue against a culture of government dependence. In reality, it's the entire country that depends on the government to solve our social problems. We—and I'm largely speaking for the middle class—expect the government to provide disaster relief, address childhood hunger, care for wounded soldiers, and educate and train future generations. We expect there to be a program to take care of the mentally ill, drug addicted, or criminally inclined. Really, how many of us in the last year have rolled up our sleeves and borne the onus of living in our communities? What was your last act of citizenship? What was mine?

It seems that we haven't the skills to address problems directly ourselves. Unfortunately, it seems we even lack the means to think about and discuss our civic actions. If you talk about civic duties or taking action in your community, most people think of serving in the military or the extremist hippie crusading for the whales. Where are the folks who represent the in-between? How do we recognize and discuss that important community work?

It's no wonder we don't have a way of understanding how the average person participates charitably in her community. Consider the fact that national conversations about citizenship have focused solely on the issue of documentation. When do we collectively define what it means to be American as more than possession of paper? To consider the duties and rewards of service within our communities? These aren't hot-button political issues of the left or right. I'm treading on something more personal. How does each of us

understand our democracy? How do we define our role and responsibilities? How are we good citizens?

It seems we have an extreme poverty, one that was glaringly obvious during our time in the DR. Americans are facing an insufficiency of action. If our government is of, by, and for the people, aren't we selfish and unrealistic to expect a government for the people if we're not doing our part to ensure it's a joint venture by the people? In the Gettysburg Address, when President Lincoln intoned that memorable phrasing, he argued that the endurance of our nation and liberty depended upon the willingness of civilians to act—to follow the example of the fallen soldiers who took dedication to their civic responsibilities to the ultimate lengths. America's disillusionment with Washington is palpable, perhaps now more than ever. However, as Lincoln puts it, we must realize that governance doesn't just take place in state capitals and DC. It also happens in soup kitchens, library basements, homeless shelters, and Girl Scout meetings. If Americans want to feel empowered, they must exert their power in their communities by acting locally for the betterment of all.

I don't intend to preach. I throw myself in with the lot. And I realize—with thanks—that there are notable exceptions to my generalizations about American culture. But as Loeb points out, our predominant culture snubs community engagement in favor of detachment. We're so far removed from taking significant action or even developing a lexicon about our service that we've constructed myths that stop us from acting: those who act must possess a superhuman benevolence or possess an ironclad, expert's knowledge of the issue to be of any real use. The fact that we only accept Mother Teresa or Rachel Carson as qualified candidates for community action says more about our fragile psyches than the nature of service.

I'm choosing to take a lesson from Chide, the villagers, the farmer who befriended the Haitians in need, and the dozen other Dominicans we met who help their neighbors. It's something Martin Luther King, Jr. (1968) said best: "Everybody can be great, because everybody can serve. You don't have to have a college degree to serve. You don't have to make your subject and your verb agree to serve... You only need a heart full of grace, a soul generated by love."

Our American deficiency will begin to subside when citizens take ownership of our communal responsibilities by shedding these myths and taking action when we see need. The villagers didn't set out to save the world, or even save Yolanda. They set out to tackle a housing issue. This is not a moral battle of goodness or an argument to prove what's right. It's a matter of fulfilling common purposes. We have a lot of need, but every long journey begins with just one step.

### References

- King, Jr., M. L. (1968, February). *Drum major instinct*. Speech presented at Ebenezer Baptist Church, Atlanta, GA.
- Loeb, P. R. (2010). *Soul of a citizen: Living with conviction in challenging times*. (2nd ed). New York, NY: St. Martin's Griffin.

## Learning to Speak Dominican

Lance Lee

“A different language is a different vision of life.” – Federico Fellini

Did you know that learning Spanish facilitates your learning of Mexican, Nicaraguan, Argentinean, Colombian, Cuban, Salvadorian, Peruvian, Dominican, and other languages? It's true; I said so. And, I should know so since I have been learning these languages since 9th grade. Wait just a second, you may say, aren't these all the same? Who is this fraud, and what does he really know? Well, I do know “CNN Spanish,” my proprietary term for the “Midwestern English” dialect of Spanish. I, however, do not purport to know every word in the Spanish language (nor in the English language). While I always maintain a certain degree of humility regarding my linguistic knowledge, during a 2011 faculty study tour to the Dominican Republic, I realized how much I actually did, and quite frankly did not, know about Dominican and the people who speak it.

Learning a language, as I frequently reiterate to my students, is an interminable process. It is (figurative) blood, (literal) sweat, and (occasionally literal) tears. It is learning rules, and it is breaking them. It is a defined system and an open-ended labyrinth. It is learning to navigate the in-between of words. It is a lifelong process, be it one's native or second language. There is no single perfect point of entry; it requires a certain sense of daring to jump into the language. And, like learning to play an instrument, a perfect performance does not occur on the first try.

Upon landing in the Dominican Republic, I had the immediate pleasure (and later pain) to fully experience my second language. Just by eavesdropping on conversations at the airport in Santo Domingo, I could tell that CNN Spanish was paradoxically both a world apart from and very close to Dominican Spanish. I was thrilled to be immersed in a Spanish-speaking environment, but, like my students in class, a little bit nervous about making mistakes. I had forewarned my fellow travelers that I would need a grace period, so to speak, to tune into the Dominican rhythm of Spanish. While I am exposed to Spanish on nearly an everyday basis, it had been a few years since I had been completely immersed in it abroad. I feared that by having taught Spanish 111 and 112 all year, my Spanish was suddenly no better

than that of my students. I rationally knew this not to be the case, but the thoughts persisted.

It turns out that I actually can speak Spanish quite well. During our long and somewhat bumpy ride from Santo Domingo to Tenares, the town where we stayed for three days, I spoke with Yolcy de la Cruz, our hospitable hostess and assistant to the tour director. We talked, *en español*, without a hitch. She was pleasantly surprised that I could speak Spanish, as was I. About halfway through the journey, my chat with Yolcy was interrupted as some young street vendors approached our van—in traffic—with an intriguing caramel-colored substance. I learned my first new Dominican word: *canquiña*, a sweet, taffy-like treat. The next day, Yolcy pointed out a park and told me that it was a *parque de canquiña*, literally a candy (*canquiña*) park. *Canquiña* would be just one of the words added to my Dominican lexicon over the next days. Other *dominicanismos* I learned: *motoconcho* (motorbike taxi), *colmado* (convenience store), *colín* (machete), and my favorite, *vaina* (thing, literally pod or sheath, but used many different ways).

Learning a word in a second language is intertwined with learning a culture. The Internet and reference books could have provided me with all of the Dominican words I just mentioned, but I would not have fully valued the cultural concept behind the word without having experienced it. I wouldn't have even known to look for those words in the first place. Take, for example, *motoconcho*. If I were to say to a native English speaker in North Carolina, "LeAnne, our tour director, took a motorbike taxi," chances are that this person would pause at "motorbike taxi." While an English-speaking North Carolinian could guess what a motorbike taxi might look like, I gained first-hand knowledge from seeing the Dominican *motoconcho* in action. Our tour director, Dr. LeAnne Disla, did indeed use a *motoconcho* in order to make the 30-minute trip back to the rural village where one of my fellow travelers had left her camera. I watched as she positioned herself precariously behind the driver on a tiny motorbike that looked like it could barely carry one person to a rural village, let alone two. But it worked, as it typically does when Dominicans need to make a quick trip relatively cheap. Although there may be a stray motorbike for hire in the US, the *motoconcho* concept does not typically exist in a native English speaker's mind in the US; it certainly didn't in mine before going to the Dominican Republic. In short, becoming linguistically competent entails becoming culturally competent.

*Colmado* is another culturally loaded word that I learned; it translates roughly as convenience store, but it signifies much more. In Sonador, the enlightening rural village where we spent two nights—and temporarily lost the camera that LeAnne retrieved via *motoconcho*—the central gathering point is the *colmado*. Like a US convenience store, the *colmado* sells various and sundry goods such as soda, snacks, glue, rope, and the occasional bottle of rum. They are much smaller than their US cousins, and the attendant gets the items for the customer. The three little *colmados* in Sonador were sparsely lit wooden shacks, not fluorescent air-conditioned behemoths like in the US. And the best part of the *colmado* is actually not the rum; the games of dominoes played directly in front of the *colmado* are. While playing dominoes with your neighbor, you can also say hello to passersby. The Dominican *colmado* unites the community rather than fueling it to the next destination.

Not every experience was as carefree as the *colmado*. I accompanied Kasey Jordan, a nursing instructor, on a hospital tour and served as interpreter (or at least tried). Up until that point, I hadn't encountered any crises of faith in my Spanish abilities, but the exceedingly fast-talking employee at the hospital in Tenares made me question the Spanish gods. I concur with my students that Spanish is a rapidly spoken language, but Dominican Spanish makes most Spanish dialects blush in shame at their relatively childlike pace. According to my ears, the woman giving us the tour neither breathed nor moved her lips while she talked. She dutifully dropped every "s" she could, as many Dominicans do, and slurred vowels and consonants to the best of her ability into a lengthy explanation of each part of the hospital. Asking her to slow down only seemed to annoy or speed her up. About five minutes into the tour, I finally understood that the rooms were empty of patients since the hospital was under construction. Kasey gained a lot (or so she alleged) from my interpretation, but I felt like going back to Spanish 111.

Those monolingual souls who have never delved into learning another language may not be able to fully grasp why I couldn't understand the lady at the hospital. Once you achieve fluency, in certain minds, you have flipped a permanent switch. You've climbed the staircase, turned on the light at the top, and now you, basking in the glow of omniscient linguistic light, can look down upon others trudging up the dim vertiginous staircase below you. Unfortunately, you can never reach the top of the staircase. There are lights along the way, but you have to change the bulbs. There are even



hidden passages that branch off from the staircase on which you currently climb, leading to more stairs. Sometimes you take a wrong turn and occasionally collapse in exhaustion, rolling down a flight or two. Most people you meet on the staircase are friendly, but some delusional fools think they've reached the peak. No one, however, can climb the staircase for you; and you can forget about elevators, too.

Contrary to what infomercials may tell us about language learning, there is no one gentle path to linguistic enlightenment. For many language learners, my endless staircase metaphor may make them want to hurl their bodies over the banister into the abyss. If you embark upon the journey, though, you will have to find your own way at times. When true learning takes place, both frustration and joy occur, regardless of the subject. Frequent exposure, an open mind, and a willingness to participate are three recurrent themes in language learning that I have encountered. Exposure to a foreign language for many students stays within the confines of the classroom, even if they keep an open mind and take part in class. Not surprisingly, those students who go beyond the classroom setting to experience Spanish firsthand make the most progress. Simply going abroad, however, is not enough to learn a language. Traveling to a country such as the Dominican Republic may fulfill the exposure component of language learning, but without an open mind and sincere efforts to speak, linguistic growth will remain stunted. The process is relentless but rewarding.

A desire for understanding and exploration motivates my linguistic journey. Languages make us human, and each language spawns a world. If we are to comprehend these distinct worlds, we need to learn the languages that create them. Once you learn one world's language, though, you discover that variants exist even in that language (i.e. Honduran, Peruvian, Mexican, and more). So, I'm continuing the journey up the linguistic staircase because going back down those stairs seems like such a waste, and besides, you meet such intriguing folks along the way while learning to speak Dominican and other languages.

## Contributors

**Kerry F. Cantwell** has been an instructor of college success for the last year and a half. Before that, she taught English at Durham Tech for nine years. She holds a Master's degree in English from James Madison University. Kerry looks forward to returning to the Dominican Republic in March 2012 as a Study Abroad chaperone.

**LeAnne Disla** is the outreach program coordinator for the Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies at Duke University.

**Constanza Gomez-Joiner** is the executive director for the Center for the Global Learner at Durham Tech. She earned her Doctorate degree in Comparative Literature from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and her Bachelor's degree in French and German from Florida State University. She began her teaching career in 1991 and has taught Spanish, French and Comparative Literature courses.

**Kasey Jordan** is an instructor in the Associate Degree Nursing program. She earned her Bachelor's degree in nursing from Georgia Health Sciences University and her Master's degree in nursing from Duke University.

**Lance Lee** has been teaching Spanish since 2006. He has been a full-time Spanish instructor at Durham Tech since Fall 2010. He holds a Master of Arts in Spanish Literature from UNC-CH and has studied in Spain, Mexico, and, most recently, the Dominican Republic.

**Erin Riney** is an instructor of developmental English and reading and also serves as the coordinator for service-learning at Durham Tech. She holds a Master's Degree in British and American Literature from North Carolina State University and a Bachelor's Degree in Sociology from Transylvania University.

**Marianne Williams** has been working with developmental students and teaching reading at Durham Tech for 20 years. She received a Master's degree in Reading Education from North Carolina State University.

**Peter Wooldridge** is the executive dean for Student Learning and Assessment at Durham Tech.









---

1637 Lawson Street  
Durham, NC 27703  
Phone: (919) 536-7200  
[www.durhamtech.edu](http://www.durhamtech.edu)